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THE SPIRIT OF CONGREGATIONALISM

Gaius Glenn Atkins

Congregationalism, when one sees it in its entirety, has always been a means an end: the right and duty of the church member to administer his own church usiness with a direct control; a minimum of ecclesiastical machinery; willing obeence to majority decisions; a disciplined respect for the right of the minority. ongregationalism believes this to be necessary to the liberty of a Christian man, d whatever else is built must be upon this foundation.

This liberty may be surrendered, but only for the sake of a larger and more clusive liberty, since freedom is always cooperative and must always extend its rporate frontiers to maintain its central sanctities. Congregationalism began and ntinued with a new conception of authority, the authority of the Christian fellowip, in essence a spiritual democracy, and beneath this the conviction that the urces of this authority are the enduements and directions of the Holy Spirit, and at thus God comes into action through human mediation. This is to establish e church upon foundations which no tumult can overthrow and whose august vereignties make hierarchies only incidents in a vaster process. Congregationalism ade the church meeting house a throne room.

In it was, and is, a conception of "communion" immediate, cooperative, vital, nacious, and elastic. It is a direct sharing of undertakings and responsibilities, endships and the fruits of the Spirit. Nothing in religious history is more moving an the covenants by which members of the early Congregational churches bound emselves together in the face of manifold perils, for the conduct of enterprises whose nplicity masked their splendor. The result, at its best, has been an immediacy of hristian fellowship whose tender beauty cannot be put into words.

The genesis and development of the fellowship principle has been modified and proved, but it has held true to its primary inspiration. The compulsions of Congationalism have always been rooted in free consent. They represent shared ions and shared undertakings. The result has been a fellowship of churches which s secured a community woven together of strong and countless filaments — no ore sectarian than truth, goodness, and Christian discipleship are sectarian. Its lo has flickered often enough and those who care for it must recognize its limitaons, but it has sought and served, far beyond its own immediate and particular terests, the realization of the Christian way in strategic human enterprises.

The "Congregational Way" possessed a power and principle which will always be serted and realized in a free society. Its two key words are: "fellowship" and ree." "Fellowship" makes it Christian. "Free" makes it great. These are more ecious than life, for without them life has lost its meaning and Christianity its ndate. Its history in its entirety is no more than the telling of how one communion ong the great fellowship of Christian communions has conceived and served these edoms and helped to make them, after its power and fashion, a priceless part of r inheritance.

The Congregational Signers of The Declaration of Independence

The Research Department of the New York Public Library has furnished information on the church affiliations of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence which lists 13 of the Signers as Congregationalists. The material submitted herewith, gathered from authoritative sources, may be of value to pastors and church leaders in preparation for the observance of Independence Day.

1. *John Adams* (Mass.) 1735-1826. Harvard; lawyer, congressman, ambassador. The first Vice President, President. He was blessed with Puritan ancestors. He said: "Let the pulpit resound with the doctrines and sentiments of religious liberty. Let us hear it emphasize the danger of thralldom, ignorance, extreme poverty and dependence; in short from civil and political slavery. Let us see it delineate the true map of man — let us hear the dignity of his nature, and the noble rank he holds among the works of God! that consenting to slavery is a sacrilegious breach of trust, as offensive in the sight of God, as it is derogatory from our own honour, or interest, or happiness; and that God Almighty has promulgated from heaven, liberty, peace, and goodwill to man."

2. *Samuel Adams* (Mass.) 1722-1803. Harvard; public official, congressman, governor. He was a worthy descendant of the Puritans. His mind was early imbued with piety. He early approached the table of the Lord Jesus, and the purity of his life witnessed the sincerity of his profession. "On the Christian sabbath, he constantly went to the temple, and the morning and evening devotions in his family proved, that his religion attended him. He wrote in favour of Christian truth, and died in the faith of the gospel."

3. *Josiah Bartlett* (N. H.) 1729-1795. Physician, legislator, judge, congressman, governor, a pioneering doctor who made many noteworthy contributions to medical knowledge. He held many offices in the colony and state with uncommon honor. "His patriotism was of a singularly elevated character, and the sacrifices which he made for the good of his country were such as few men are willing to make."

4. *William Ellery* (R. I.) 1727-1820. Harvard; lawyer, congressman, chief justice. He said: "Humility rather than pride ill become such creatures as we are." "He looked upon the affairs of men with deep religious serenity. He firmly believed The Lord reigneth."

5. *Lyman Hall* (Ga.) 1731-1791. Yale; Connecticut born and educated. Established practice at Medway, Ga., 1752. Doctor, planter, congressman, governor. A life-long worker for political independence. He was by nature characterized by a warm and enthusiastic disposition, which, however, was under the guidance of a sound discretion. John Adams said of him as member of Congress, "He was an intelligent a spirited man who made a powerful addition our phalanx."

6. *John Hancock* (Mass.) 1737-1796. H vard; merchant, legislator, president of the C tinental Congress, Governor. His father a grandfather were Congregational clergymen. said: "Be mindful of your solemn devotions your temples set apart by God himself for worship. Reverence for religion is paramou and the eyes of heaven penetrate the dark chambers of the soul."

7. *Samuel Huntington* (Conn.) 1732-17 Common school education. Life-long stude farmer, lawyer, judge, member of Congre governor. He was a man of decided Christi character, a professor of religion and a devo attendant of the church. He was a leader in t church services. He went to his grave in surance of a happy immortality.

8. *Robert Treat Paine* (Mass.) 1731-18 Harvard; studied theology, then law. Congre man, judge. He was a lay preacher and chapla of the Armed Forces. He said: "We doubt n the purity of our intentions, and the integrity our conduct, will justify us at that great tribun before which all mankind must submit to juc ment. We ask but for peace, liberty, and safety It was said of him: "Judge Paine was a fi believer in the divine origin of the Christi religion. He gave full credence to the scriptur as a revelation from God, designed to instru mankind in a knowledge of their duty, and guide them in the way to eternal happiness."

9. *Roger Sherman* (Conn.) 1721-1793. N tive of Mass. Common school education; life-long student, surveyor, lawyer, member Congress, judge, treasurer of Yale College. H was a regular church attendant. His grandfath was for 54 years pastor at Lebanon, Conn., a two of his brothers were Congregational clerg men. "He was eminently a pious man and lo a professor of religion. It was to him a princip and a habit. He studied the Bible with de attention and was intimately acquainted with t doctrines of the gospel." "He was faithful the profession of Christianity which he ma in youth."

10. *Matthew Thornton* (N. H.) 1714-18 Native of Ireland. Physician and surgeon, am commander, judge, member of Congress, chi justice of N. H. He said: "Our duty to God, ourselves, to posterity, have urged us to take arms in our own defence. We must cultiva that Christian union, harmony, and tender affe tion, which is the only foundation upon whi our invaluable privileges can rest." "In a wor we seriously and earnestly recommend the pra tice of that pure and undefiled religion, whi embalmed the memory of our pious ancesto as that alone upon which we can build a sol hope and confidence in the Divine protecti

favour, without whose blessing all the sures of safety we have, or can propose, will in our shame and disappointment."

1. *William Whipple* (N. H.) 1730-1785. mmon school education, but he was for all life a diligent and careful student. Shipping ter, successful general, congressman, judge. as said of him: "Few men have been more essful in maintaining a worthy religious life is community."

2. *William Williams* (Conn.) 1731-1811. vard; studied theology, soldier, congressman. brother was a Congregational clergyman. While yet scarcely more than a youth, he was ted deacon in the church to which he be- ed and he served in that office during the re- nder of his life."

3. *Oliver Wolcott* (Conn.) 1726-1797. ; soldier, judge, congressman, governor. It said of him: "He was distinguished for his of religion and for his Christian walk and secration. The memory of his personal worth, patriotism, his Christian conversation, will go n to generations yet unborn."

e Sense of History Basic for Progress

The very conception of history as we now sess it derives from this Old Testament reve- on. . . . In Greek thought there is no view he world as history.

The essence of the discovery of history which Western world owes to the Bible lies in its erentiation of history from nature. NATURE he realm of uniformity governed by general s that keep producing identical and verifiable lts, while HISTORY is the realm of signifi- t change produced by and productive of uine individuality and genuine novelty always olving personal will.

For most if not all other religions the wheel existence "rotates eternally on its own axis in so doing achieves nothing and advances hing. And wherever any contrary idea exists the world, WHEREVER HISTORY IS UGHT AS INVOLVING A SENSE OF RECTION, AS TENDING UPWARDS, AS LEADING TO A BETTER FUTURE AN THE PRESENT, THE INFLUENCE RECT OR INDIRECT OF THE OLD STAMENT REVELATION CAN BE EARLY TRACED."

JOHN BAILLIE, *Belief in Progress*, p. 65

paration for Independence Day

The material concerning the Signers of the laration of Independence has been gathered many sources, including the New York lic Library, Boston Public Library, and es- ally the Congregational Library, Boston. In nection with the record of Congregationalists in the first Congress, it is interesting to note that in the present Congress, 10 senators and 18 members of the House are listed as being Congregational Christians.

Renewing Old Associations

The following letter when relayed to the churches mentioned brought interesting letters. Note the overtone in the last sentence.

"Our church is observing its centennial this year and we are interested in the churches of the east that were concerned to help found our western churches as the population moved over these plains. The West Medway Church sent us $45 in 1856; the Second, now Federated, Church in Millbury sent us $35; the Eliot Church in Newton sent us 200 volumes for our library and $100; and the Whitinsville Church sent us a thousand pound bell which still hangs in our belfry and calls our people to worship.

"What could you tell us about these churches which would be of interest for our centennial? This might also stimulate our Missionary giving as we think of other pioneer effort of Congregational churches."

PERRY WAYNE VAN KIRK, minister
Faribault, Minnesota

Their Records Safe

The beautiful Eliot Church of Newton, Mass., was entirely destroyed by fire February 11, 1956. The stained glass windows and the organ pipes melted in the terrific heat. But "the church records and the *parish rolls going back to the foundation of the Eliot Religious Society in 1845* were found *intact in the church vault*."

Dr. Ray Eusden, speaking to a congregation of more than 600 meeting in the Methodist church the Sunday following, said: "We have lost very heavily. There is no doubt about that. But the loss is physical. We still have the assets of faith, courage and hope, and on these we will build for the future."

Announcements

The fall issue of the News Letter will be a special number for Forefathers' Day, Sunday, November 18th, available after October 20th. Begin planning now for this important anniversary.

Additional copies of this News Letter and future issues will be sent postpaid — 10 copies free, additional copies for your literature table or church school classes at the cost of printing, 1¢ per copy.

Death of Harry B. Sherman

Mr. Sherman, historian of the Rhode Island Conference and deputy governor of the National Society of Mayflower Descendants, died in Providence, March 28th. He was an early member of this Society, a valued helper and a wise adviser. He will be greatly missed.

Gaius Glenn Atkins

Dr. Atkins, preacher, teacher and writer of wide reputation, died at Bethlehem, Pa., April 5th. He was a life-long student of Congregational history and a writer of singular charm and insight. He was one of the founders of this Society and gave us courage and instruction. We shall not see his like again. For fourteen years he wrote the annual Fellowship of Prayer. See page 1 for his message.

The Presbyterian Historical Society Going Ahead

The Presbyterian Historical Society, organized in 1852, the oldest church history society in America, has had a splendid record of helpfulness for more than a hundred years. A year ago it launched a program of expansion which brought over 500 new members, and this year it has set its goal for a thousand additional. This Society maintains a reference library, conducts a wide correspondence, assists churches, synods and other church agencies with celebrations and publishes books and papers. This Society sets a fine example.

First Protestant Church in Mississippi

The Swayze families and fellow-settlers formed a Congregational church at Kingston, Miss., before the Revolution. Samuel Swayze, who had been a minister of that church in New Jersey, organized this first Protestant church in the Mississippi territory and was its pastor from 1773 to his death in 1785. The church, now Methodist, is planning a great celebration in 1957, the centennial of the building of its present beautiful church.

The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson, Miss.

A Question Asked and Answered

"If and when the 'merger' is comp what happens to the Congregational Ch Historical Society?" A Missouri pastor.

The officials and members of the Boa Governors, including both "pros" and "a are unanimous in the decision taken at th meeting of the Society that it shall continu develop its plans and program with unc vigor. As the years come and go there will be a need to strengthen and to rene elementary features of American civic a ligious life. As A. J. Toynbee has so well "My expectation is that the challenge sented to Western civilization in our tim going to arouse us to repent, to reform, a lead a new life." Such was the purpose Fathers and to undergird and to maintai freedoms is no less arduous today; it is even essential.

Books Wanted

Old Year Books — especially for the 1893-1932

Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus*
Rossiter, *Seed Time of The Republic*
Winslow, *Meeting House Hill*
Keller, *The Second Great Awakeni Connecticut*

Help Wanted

To keep pace with the expanding work Society it needs additional support. Inte churches and individuals are cordially invi become members and to nominate indiv for membership. Kindly send nominatio the office of the Society.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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